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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 002606

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT APPOINTS FIRST FEMALE MINISTER; CABINET
RESHUFFLE POSSIBLE

REF: KUWAIT 2229

Classified By: DCM Matthew Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Press reports that Kuwait has appointed Kuwait University Political Science professor and women's rights activist Dr. Massouma Al-Mubarak as Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative and Development Affairs have been confirmed by Dr. Massouma and sources inside the Prime Minister's Diwan. The decision marks a historic first for Kuwait and highlights the GOK's efforts to expand political rights to women, which had previously culminated in the May 16 National Assembly vote that granted women voting rights. Dr. Massouma replaces Shaykh Ahmed Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, who will retain his post as Minister of Communications and also assume the post of Minister of Health. The addition of Dr. Massouma, a Shiite, to the cabinet likely serves the additional purpose of appeasing Kuwait's Shiite minority, who have been without cabinet-level representation since January. Although these are the only cabinet changes post is aware of at this time, a senior advisor to Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah has indicated there may be more changes in the near future.

12. (C) Dr. Massouma told Poloffs she had not been expecting the appointment, but was very pleased to have been granted the opportunity to show that Kuwaiti women could be effective leaders. She said she hoped she could use her new position to advance the status of women in Kuwait. Well-known activist, Dr. Rola Dashti, concurred, telling Poloff that she was also optimistic about the appointment, which she had known about for a day.

13. (C) In a separate conversation, Assistant Undersecretary of the Prime Minister's Diwan, Shaykh Fawaz Saud Nasser Al-Sabah hinted that there may be other cabinet changes in the works. Responding to Poloff's message of congratulations on the appointment of the new minister, Shaykh Fawaz asked "which one?" When asked, Shaykh Fawaz would not confirm any additional changes, but added that Poloff should "wait and see."

14. (U) The appointment of Dr. Massouma rounds out the cabinet, which under Article 56 of the 1962 Constitution cannot constitute more than one-third of the number of members of the 50-person National Assembly.

Biographical Information

14. (U) Dr. Massouma Saleh Al-Mubarak is a well known Embassy contact and a regular attendee of Public Diplomacy events. She participated in the International Visitors Program in February - March 2000, attending a course on Political Leadership and Campaigning for Women. She earned her PhD in Political Science from Colorado State University in 1982 and her Master's Degree in International Relations from North Texas in 1981. Married to a Bahraini national, she is the mother of three daughters and one son. Dr. Massouma appears to be in her late 50s and wears traditional hijab headcovering. A long-time advocate for women's rights, she is one of a group of Kuwaiti women who had annually attempted to register their names on voting roles in protest of female disenfranchisement.

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